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CHAPTER XXIII.

OF MEASLES, SMALL-POX, AND THE MURRAIN IN CATTLE.

600 THE physician Roderigo Fonseca observes, "The plague was never seen either in the East or West Indies, but we know that in America a million Indians were destroyed by the small-pox not many years back, when no Spaniard took the infection. This disease was introduced amongst them by a Negro." I say nothing of the East Indies, being an utter stranger to them, but every one agrees that no plague ever raged in America: if you have read the contrary in any historian, remember that catarrh, ague, and diarrhœa, if long and widely prevalent, are called the plague by the lower orders of Spaniards. The small-pox and measles too are not improperly denominated the plague by the Indians. We have also frequently experienced
731 a murrain in cattle fatal to horses, oxen, and above all to mules; a disease induced not by the pestilence of the air, but by the badness of the pastures, or the scarcity of water. This sort of disorder may be truly called contagious, the mere contact with sick or dead bodies being infectious. Swelling of the head, and blood

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trickling from the nostrils were symptoms of the reigning disorder; the same signs too indicated the bites of serpents in animals. Mutilating the ear, and cutting the vein of the fore foot, were admirable remedies against the poison of that disease in mules, especially if salt were given them to lick. The paunches of the oxen slain to feed the Indians are daily thrown out, along with the bowels, into an open place, where all the horses and mules eagerly crowd to lick the garbage, because a sort of salt and nitre is created by the blood of which they are excessively fond. Therefore, whilst this dreadful murrain raged in our territories we daily sprinkled those entrails with salt, the salubrity of which is proved by the circumstance, that whilst numbers died in the neighbouring estates, very few sickened, and many recovered with us in the town of St. Joachim.

It is beyond all controversy, that small-pox is the true plague of the Americans, and that it has been lately introduced into America, either by Europeans or Negroes. Hence the just complaint of the Indians. "The Europeans are fine people, truly! They have made liberal compensation for the infinity of gold and silver they have taken from us, by leaving us the plague of the small-pox." Indeed it is a well known fact that the number of Indians who have died of this

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A 164 disease during the two last centuries, defy all calculation. In the thirty Guarany towns some G [165] thirty thousand persons died of the small-pox in the year 1734.

000 It is not true that the Spaniards and other Europeans in America are exempted from small-pox; but it cannot be doubted that the Indians take it sooner, and more frequently die of it. I am of opinion that their habit of body has less strength to repel or overcome that poison. They generally eat half-raw and unsalted meat; they always go with their heads and feet bare; they drink nothing but water, and that not of the best kind, except at a few festive drinking parties in the course of the year; all which tend to weaken the stomach. The heat of the sun, and the constant use of maize, cause a ferment in their blood which, on the accession of small-pox, very frequently proves fatal. This must be understood of the pedestrian Indians only, for the Abipones, and other equestrian Indians, who do not labour under those A 164 miseries to which the pedestrians are subject, generally have the small-pox in a milder form.

G In the year 1765 this plague carried off great A numbers in the Spanish colonies. Having swept 731 away about twelve thousand persons in the thirty 165 Guarany towns, it spread to the distant hordes 164 of the savages scattered throughout Chaco, and

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though almost all took the infection, yet few died in proportion to the number of the sick. I speak of the equestrians, who were saved by the strength of their constitutions. In the town which I founded for the Abipones, one woman only escaped the contagion, yet out of the many hundreds that took the disease, twenty alone fell victims to it.

Often no mention is made of the small-pox for many years amongst the Indians; but this calm is the sure forerunner of an approaching storm. We have always found the small pox break out first in the colonies of the Spaniards, and spread from thence to the farthest hordes of the Indians; who, having learnt from the experience of their ancestors, to dread this disease as their death, separate from their hordesmen as soon as ever they have the least suspicion of its approach, and fly, some one way, some another, in precipitate haste. Upon this occasion they travel not in a straight line, but by various meanders and windings. That this method is superstitiously observed by the Lules, Isistines, Vilelas, Homoampas, and Chunipies, I was told by Fathers who had resided long amongst them. Through fear of the contagion, fathers desert their sick sons, and sons their fathers. They leave a pitcher of water, and some roasted maize at the sick

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man's bed, and consult their own safety by flight. I should wrong the Abipones were I to say that they imitate them in these particulars. They do indeed turn their backs on the spot where the pestilence prevails, and crowd to their lurking-places in the woods; but on these occasions, they travel straight onwards, as usual, nor ever neglect their sick friends and relations, studiously performing the duties of humanity. Their endurance of pain and inconvenience at such times is likewise deserving of commendation. Even whilst the disorder rages with malignant heats I never heard them womanishly crying or complaining. They account the least groan a dishonour, and, to maintain the character for fortitude, endeavour to endure the bitterness of disease in silence.

I generally found this disorder most fatal to persons of a melancholy, choleric habit, or of advanced age, and to women in a state of pregnancy. To those upon whom, after a feverish heat, the small-pox slowly broke out, in whom it was blackish, thick, depressed, and spotted in the middle, or mixed with red and confluent, I presaged great danger and speedy death; —a prediction generally verified by the event. When the small-pox and swelling quickly disappear, all hope of the patient's recovery disappears likewise. I generally observed that per-

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of Spaniards he had slain. Here it may be observed that the Americans, who have had the genuine small-pox, do not fear the return of it. At five years of age I had the small-pox so slightly, that I was marked in ten places only, and was ill but two days. Yet that this short sickness is, by the law of nature, sufficient, I was fully persuaded, after living many months, day and night, with Indians who had the disorder, without taking the infection.

Almost the same observations may be made on measles as on small-pox. It rages at intervals, spreads, and cuts off vast numbers in America. Whilst I resided in the town of St. Joachim, out of two thousand Indians so many were laid up with this disorder, that often none were left to supply the sick with food, water, wood and medicines. The offices due to the minds and bodies of the sick kept Father Joseph Fleischauer and myself occupied day and night for some months. That pestilence carried off two hundred persons, out of which number there were very few infants, and no old men, most of them being persons in the flower of their age. The tertian ague sometimes spreads like a contagion amongst the Indians, but is more troublesome than dangerous, and prevails only in those places where stinking ditch water is in constant use. For the same reason ter-